



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

Faith-Based Organization Guidance for Funeral Services during a Pandemic

Rationale

Gatherings, such as funerals and other events, can contribute to the spread of a pandemic virus by individuals carrying the virus, and unknowingly introducing it to others. During a pandemic, emergency response operations are often fluid and rapidly evolving; potentially resulting in changes in guidelines, executive orders, and containment strategies as conditions evolve. As a result, physical distancing restrictions may possibly ebb and flow in the relaxation, tightening, or changing of limits regarding gathering size and other parameters. Maintain situational awareness on key prevention and mitigation strategies ([CDC Website](#)), COVID-19 activity ([ADHS Website](#)), Executive Orders ([AZ Governors Website](#)), local public health guidance, tribal community guidance, and your faith-based organization/tribal updates. Coordinate with your local health/tribal health official and follow recommended health and safety precautions. It is important to stay compliant with current guidelines and recommendations from national, state, tribal, and local authorities.

Communicate with Funeral Homes and Others

In planning for fatality management surge, coordination with funeral homes and service partners is recommended to identify potential issues, challenges, or barriers.

Alternatives to Traditional Services

- Consider memorial services, rather than funerals, so that bodies may be immediately buried or cremated. Religious rites may be held without bodies being present.
- Consider virtual rituals to replace traditional services. This allows for the disposition of bodies in a timely manner.

Considerations for Memorials or Funeral Services

In the event an on-campus memorial or funeral service is planned:

- Limit access to non-essential areas.
- Conduct environmental cleaning between services with EPA-approved cleaning products for viruses.
- Consider offering handwashing stations or hand sanitizer, apart from restrooms. Consider requesting or offering gloves and masks to be worn.
- Avoid hugging before, during, and after services.
- Encourage high-risk populations not to attend or to participate in alternative ways (e.g., online, phone, or recorded).
- Limit total attendance to 10 people (or recommended attendance from state and local authorities).
- Hold the services in a large, well-ventilated area.



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- Maintain 6-ft distances or otherwise spread out the configuration of those attending through alternating pews or other seating arrangements.
- Train staff how to identify and address issues with any modifications to services.
- Communicate and promote hand-hygiene and respiratory etiquette to help slow the spread of infectious diseases. This may be accomplished through information circulated prior to the service and with signage. Please advise them of the CDC guidance ([COVID-19 How to Protect Yourself & Others](#)).
- Avoid touching the body of a decedent confirmed or suspected to have been infected with the disease agent or who may have had symptoms. Significant exposure risk should be avoided. However, there is no known risk associated with being in the same room with the body of a decedent who died of a pandemic virus.
- Consider modifying requirements for signing forms (e.g., use email or e-signature). For guest books, consider internet options for sharing memories, thoughts, and recognition of participation.

Relevant Trends for Familiarization

Pandemics typically (though not necessarily) happen in three waves. Immunity often takes place over multiple years, or when a) a vaccine is readily available or b) effective ways to treat COVID-19 are developed. It may be unclear how to determine when an epidemic wave is over. However, being prepared for more periods of physical distancing and event limitations due to resurgence may be in order. Plan preparations work best when integrated into a regular cycle of preparations, training, organizational review, and improvement planning. For more information, visit the CDC planning guide – “[Get Your Community- and Faith-Based Organizations Ready for Pandemic Flu](#).”

Additional Resources

- [COVID-19 Fact Sheet for Faith-based Organizations](#) - ADHS
- [COVID-19 Resource Web Page](#) - Arizona Faith Network
- [Interim Pre-pandemic Planning Guidance: Community Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Mitigation in the United States](#) – CDC
- [COVID-19 Cases, Data, and Surveillance](#) – CDC
- [Get Your Community – and Faith-Based Organizations Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#) – CDC